Wetaskiwin Times

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WETASKIWIN'S CENTENARIAN--Joseph H. Winter.

Wetaskiwin is one of the few cities of Canada that can boast the presence of a centenarian. To get right down to cases: he has been with us for only the past few weeks, and at that as a victim of circumstances. But, let's go back to the beginning. Joseph H. Winter was born in Atlanta, Georgia, on May 5th, 1841, nearly one hundred and one years ago. His wife was gored to death by a rampaging bull, and his only two children were lost to him through attacks of typhoid fever. He knows his war stuff, having served with Morgan's Horse, a cavalry unit of the Confederacy under Brig. Gen. Morgan, taking a very prominent part in the Civil War. His father passed away at the age of 110, and his mother reached the 98-year mark before succumbing.

And now the picture gets a bit of local color. In 1902 Mr. Winter wanderlusted up into Canada and spent four years as a bridgeman in the employ of the Canadian Pacific Railway in Alberta. There's not many men who drift into the homesteading game after reaching the 62-year mark; but that's just what Mr. Winter did, locating in the Falun district, which property he retains and has rented out due to recent developments.

Last December he suffered an attack of the flu and was removed from his homestead to the Community Hospital for treatment, and upon his discharge took up residence, upon physician's advice, in the Braa apartments. Incidentally this was the first time in his life in which he had suffered

illness necessitating hospital treatment.

When the young lady from The Times called on Saturday last to pay our respects, the old gentleman was nestled in a comfortable armchair pulling away on a cigarette. Realizing, however, that a member of the gentler sex had made an invasion, his courtesy prompted him to endeavor to make a sneakaway with the fag. Too late! And the upshot was that he finished his smoke, while The Times rep. pumped him with questions. She found him of affable disposition, free in speech and quite lively on his feet. It was noted also that, while he possesses a pair of specs, he is able to read considerably without their aid.

As an indication of his spryness, be it known that he is a member of the Masonic order, having been initiated in November, 1903, in Bow River Lodge No. 1, Calgary, and made a life member in 1930; and that recently he climbed two flights of stairs in the Bank of Montreal building here to attend a meeting of the local Lodge, on December 18th, to be exact, just after being discharged from the hospital. He didn't leave for his apartment until midnight with the remark that he had spent one of the most enjoyable evenings of his entire life. So much for Wetaskiwin hospitality! And Wetaskiwin deeply appreciates the honor involved.

CIVIL WAR DAYS ARE RECALLED BY WETASKIWIN CENTENARIAN

Jimmy Winters, one of the keenest-eyed, spryest men in Wetaskiwin, will attain his 103rd birthday on May 5. He has led a life of adventure and faces the world yet with youthful eyes, though he tells visitors there are too many old folks in the Eventide Home, where he now lives, to make life really exciting.

Born in Georgia in 1841, Mr. Winters was raised on his father's farm, where his education consisted chiefly in learning to break and ride horses. As he grew up he and his friends rode far and wide to the country dances in large homes in his own and neighboring States. With a reminiscent twinkle in his eye, he tells of "dancing many a night while Morgan fiddled"--John Hunt Morgan, who lived near Lexington, Kentucky.

When the Southern States threatened secession in 1861, the loyalties of whole families were sorely tried. His two older brothers rode away from his father's wrath, to join the Union Army. He himself, a great admirer of Morgan, took his own pony and rode off to fight for the Confederate cause, one of Morgan's Horse.

NIGHT RAIDS

When camps were set up in Kentucky to train raw Yankee recruits in the art of soldiering, Morgan and his men raided them night after night. In dare-devil sallies, the memory of which after 80 years, can still bring the light of battle to the old soldier's eyes.

Asked if he had ever been taken prisoner he uttered a startling loud guffaw of laughter before he answered, "Yes, I was a prisoner once for one hour, long enough to get a decent supper."

He was riding his own horse alone one evening, about sundown, when he accidentally rode into a dozen Union men under a Yankee sergeant. He said he wasn't ready to stop a bullet yet, so surrendered at once. The soldiers quite companionably invited him to share their savour stew.

After supper the sergeant remarked, "That's a fine-looking horse you've got there."

"Sure," he replied, "He's a good saddler, if you know how to ride him."

"The Northener," he went on, with a bubbling gurgle of amusement, "was riled, and boasted that he'd show them how a Yankee could ride."

The young prisoner saddled his pony again for them, explaining that the horse was not used to strangers.

The gurgle of amusement burst into another hearty laugh.

SERGEANT GOES FLYING

"You should have seen that sergeant go flying," he said. "He only got one foot in the stirrup when my horse did a fancy side-step and threw him over into the brush. The others all had a try too--each time the horse getting a little further away and the men following. When I thought they were all far enough away from their stacked rifles, I jumped on my pony and escaped."

"Yes," he ruminated, as he chewed the end of a match, "I sure was a prisoner," and again that grand old laugh burst forth.

He stayed with Morgan four years. When the war was over the South was full of bitterness and unrest. Mr. Winter's story closely bears out all one hears which followed cessation of hostilities. He vididly recalls the reign of terror in the hills of Kentucky and Tennessee, caused by outlaws such as the Dillon brothers. A gleam of pride brightened his eyes as he recounted how he had once actually seen the famous Jesse James.

STILL BITTER

Mr. Winters is still bitter against the freed negro overseers, a domineering type, who took advantage of their freedom, and tried to associate with whites and even white women. Asked if he had ever seen or worn the Ku Klux costume, his face assumed a poker expression as he answered, "I reckon maybe I did."

When an apology was made for asking too personal a question, the old gentleman courteously remarked that he reckoned it didn't make any difference now anyway, but he added, shaking his head, "Those were bad times down there."

Their home in Georgia ruined, the young Confederate soldier and his father decided to go cattle-ranching in Texas, from which State, after his father's death a few years later, he drifted north to Michigan. In the early eighties he found himself in Ontario, where some of his mother's people had settled. There he met and married a

lovely young woman and planned to settle down for life. Here, the old eyes clouded over as he explained that this, the happiest period of his life, lasted only a short time, for tragedy sono struck hard at his little home. His young wife was gored and killed by a maddened bull. Not long after while still grief-stricken, he had to watch his two beautiful little daughters, one after the other, die of typhoid fever. Although 60 years have passed since that episode he affirms that he has never met another woman whom he cared to put in his wife's place.

ITCHING FOOT

He'd always had an itching foot anyway he says, so he soon left Ontario for the West, attaching himself to the Canadian Pacific Railway as a bridge-builder. With a grin he admits that he was getting rather old for such strenuous work, so he decided to "take life easy", by going on a homestead in the bush country near Pigeon Lake, west of Wetaskiwin.

Here he led a bachelor existence for many years, but he says in a complaining voice (one suspects irony), "Homesteading broke my health down. I had to retire when I was 99, doctor's orders, after a bout with pneumonia. That's when I came to this Home."

Although Mr. Winters admits that his joints are a bit stiff for getting out of a Chesterfield chair, and his eyes aren't quite so good for reading, and he doesn't catch quite all that people say, yet to look at him, walking straight and surely, as he makes his daily trip to the Post Office,

one might easily guess his age as 60 or 70. His memory is intact--he can recite in stentorian tones a declamation on the conquests and ruin of Napoleon which would fraze a college student.

He has a keen sense of humor and loves a good joke. He enjoys the religious services held frequently at the Eventide Home and follows very seriously the course of world events. He hopes to live long enough to see Hitler get what's coming to him. He is a Mason and attends the meetings regularly occasionally contributing to their programs with his long prose recitations.

Truly, being a centenarian is a delightful thing when one can attain it with such grace and charm as "Old Man Winters".